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HUMAN RELATIONS

By RAMON WYER, I. E. 3

EDITOR'S NOTE: Tau Beta Pi awarded the following essay first prize.

Today, our nation is faced with a new industrial order. Where our forefathers were tillers of the soil, we today, are manufacturers, from the lowliest laborer to the highest executive. This transition from an agricultural to an industrial nation has brought many new and puzzling problems. Chief among these is the so-called "capital-labor" problem. The failure of the capitalist and the laborer to understand that their interests are mutual has brought much grief to all, in spite of the fact that it is on this basic principle that all human engineering rests.

Our newly created industries have thrown together into daily contact thousands of human beings of all sorts of habits and from all walks of life. It is absolutely necessary that their relationships should be founded on a firm basis of fair dealing and cooperation. It is this problem, demanding full recognition of the varying mental and physical characteristics of the individuals involved, that confronts the industrial engineer today. And in order to solve it, he must realize that while industry revolves about machines and the resulting mass production, the human element is the controlling factor in any organization.

The underlying fundamental for controlling this human element is, as was stated above, that the employer's and the employee's interests are mutual and that therefore there is no necessity for conflicts between them. The fact that we have many such conflicts today which are mutually costly shows more clearly that we must view industry as a cooperative undertaking if we would eliminate them. In order to attain this end, many steps are being taken by managers and engineers that give to the employees the things that they have a reasonable right to expect in return for their services.

The most prevalent cause of dissatisfaction among the workers is the wages that they receive. In spite of the fact that it is an underlying trait of human character to want individual recognition for ability and attainments, many employers are still paying their men without regard to individual performance. The sooner that wages are placed on the sound basis of paying men just rewards for services rendered, the sooner wage conflicts will be eliminated. Also, in order to maintain and improve the high standard of living that has been established, it is absolutely essential that we pay the workers a sufficient wage to give them and their families a chance to live up to this standard. However, fair wages and high wages mean little to an employee if he works but a few months of the year. He has a reasonable right to expect steady employment and it is the duty of the employer to fulfill this expectation.

One of the most widely used means of furthering the employer-employee relationship is the "employee representation" plan. Under this plan, the employees have representatives from their own ranks who not only voice whatever dissatisfaction may arise among the workers but who also confer with the managers and help to improve working conditions, increase efficiency, improve quality and methods, and eliminate waste. These conferences

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between the workers and the executives improve the morale of the men, help the men to understand their company better, and help the executives to realize their functions as leaders.

Another phase of human relations is the safeguarding of life and health. The efforts along this line have been directed into two distinct channels. On the one hand, all sorts of safety devices and mechanical safeguards have been invented and applied in order to prevent accidents and to make the worker safer; while on the other hand, accident and sickness insurance have be-

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come prevalent means of helping employees who have been injured or who have lost money due to illness. Along this same line, there are various kinds of old age insurance and pension plans. It is reasonable to expect that a man who gives the best years of his life in service to a company should be given some help when he is no longer able to earn a living. With this fact in mind, many of the larger corporations are providing for those of their workers who are too old to work.

In order to better human relations in industry, the managers must expend great sums of money. The question is often raised as to whether or not this is a wise investment. Charles M. Schwab says, "We look upon it as being really an investment in national well being. I realize in what I have just said I am making a broad claim. . . ." Surely the engineer with his trained powers of analysis will be among the first to see the effect that these better relationships have had in advancing his own science for he no longer finds an unenlightened resistance to the fruits of his genius."
